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HISTORIC ACCOMPLISHMENT AS AGENCY VETERAN SERVICE OFFICERS ARE CERTIFIED THROUGH ADVS



Pictured above are the four agency VSOs who were certified by ADVS (left to right): ADVS Training Manager and Information Officer Scott Fincher, Shiprock Agency VSO Wallace Charley, Western Agency VSO Eunice J. Begay, Eastern Agency VSO Marie Zwierlein, Chinle Agency VSO Bobbie Ann Baldwin, Navajo Nation Vice President Jonathan Nez, Assistant Deputy Director for ADVS John Scott, and Acting Navajo Nation Veterans Administration Director Hubert Smith.

CHINLE - Four Navajo Agency Veteran Service Officers (VSO) were trained and certified to submit claims and represent veterans in cases of appeal through the Arizona Department of Veteran Services (ADVS).

"This is completely historic. It's the first time this has ever happened on any Native American nation," said John Scott, Assistant Deputy Director for the ADVS.

The accreditation of agency VSOs by ADVS is a direct result of the passing of the Navajo Veterans Act, which was prioritized by the Begaye-Nez Administration. The Navajo Veterans Act established the Navajo Veteran's Affairs Office as an official organization, which in turn allowed ADVS the ability to accredit agency VSOs.

On Jun. 24, 2016, Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye joined ADVS Director Wanda Wright for a ceremonial signing of a Memorandum of Understanding that allowed ADVS to accredit Navajo Veteran Service officers.

The MOU between the Navajo Nation and ADVS affords Navajo VSOs to access to all Veteran's Affairs infrastructure to file claims on behalf of Navajo veterans.

"The Navajo Nation has a high percentage of veterans per capita. This accreditation allows us to reach veterans in rural areas and provide services to them. It opens the door for our ability to serve them," said President Begaye.

Vice President Jonathan Nez attended the certification ceremony which was held at the Chinle Department of Veteran Affairs on Friday, Feb. 3.

"On behalf of President Begaye and myself, I would like to congratulate the four VSOs who received their certification here today," Vice President Nez said. "We envisioned a really strong veterans program and with your help, we will be able to reach those veterans out there who feel they might be neglected or undeserved because of their location."

Agency VSOs will now have the ability to file forms for compen-

sation, injuries incurred from when a veteran was in the military, low income pensions for veterans who struggled with financial issues during wartime, and/or advocate for veterans outside of strictly filing claims.

ADVS Training Manager and Information Officer Scott Fincher said the certification will benefit Navajo communities in multiple ways.

"Prior to the four VSOs being trained, we had only one state employee, who worked for ADVS, located here in Chinle. There was only one state employee handling claims and benefits for the entire Navajo Nation, as an accredited representative," Fincher said. "Now you have four, strategically located VSOs in different parts of the Nation."

Fincher said that Navajo Agency VSOs will be able to do more outreach into places where veterans don't have transportation but can still receive services.

"It's very historic because it's the first time in the country that VSOs from native nations have become accredited," said Vice President Nez. "This certification is an example of Begaye-Nez administration's efforts to serve our veterans by extending and providing services to them."

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